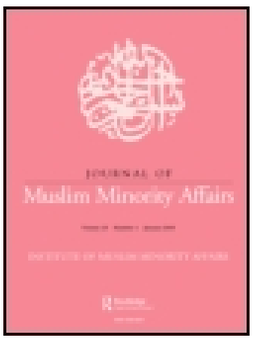

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Chinese Oppressive Policies Towards the Muslims in East Turkistan

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Abstract

Nazi concentration camps were considered to be the worst humanitarian crisis in the twentieth century and the world believed that this scenario will never happen again. In today's modern world, in the twenty-first century, the Chinese Communist Party has imprisoned millions of indigenous Turkics in concentration camps in which they are being forced to deny their faith, abandon their own culture, and assimilate to Chinese culture as a whole nation. This paper, initially evaluates the development of China and East Turkistan relations and Beijing's policies towards this region. Then, it examines the situation of concentration camps and who is being held captive and what crimes they have committed in the eyes of the Chinese government. Last but not least, it examines how the Chinese dream, nationalist policies, and developments of international politics played an important role in the establishment of these concentration camps.

Keywords: *China; East Turkistan; human right violations; concentration camps; international developments*

Introduction

The East Turkistan region is a large geographical area consists of one-sixth of China's landmass, which stretches from the Pamir Mountains in the west to the Great Wall of China in the east, known to be the homeland of the Turks (Turkic ethnicity), where great states were founded and advanced civilizations emerged. Its strategically located along a 5600-kilometer border with eight nations.[1] In the nineteenth century, with the widespread chaos, internal conflicts, and ignorance, the Turkics began to lose their power and strength which they possessed in the past. This situation proved to be an opportunity for countries like Russia and China to take over the region. West Turkistan was occupied by Russia whereas East Turkistan lost its sovereignty in 1949 and remained under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule. Turkic Muslims who make up the majority of population in the region were deprived of their political rights alongside other rights granted by the Chinese constitution.[2] After losing political sovereignty, indigenous people have been under CCP's repression and assimilation policy, as their beliefs and culture is consistently under threat.

The security situation has become even more strict after the 2009 and 2014 policy change; economic policy establishment was given up and instead strict security policies were adapted in the so-called People's War on Terror.[3] Former head of Tibet Autonomous Region (Chen Quanguo) was appointed as a top official to the XUAR in 2016.

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Since then, he began to implement excessive repression policies, which he had applied to Tibet and regarding East Turkistan he even went further in terms of oppression. Chen Quanguo has made the region into an open-air prison exacerbating human rights violations. Large number of muslims detained without due process.[4] Even he refused to give the people their basic human rights of the modern world, like freedom of belief and the right to speaking their own mother tongue. He opened camps in the region under the pretext of vocational education school and imprisoned millions of people. Muslims here have been forced to deny Islam, praise the CCP, learn Chinese, and subjected to suffer various tortures.[5] The final aim of CCP was to terminate the Turkic culture and Islamic identity which is different from the Han culture.

The land of Eastern Turkistan is considered vital to fulfill the Chinese dream and a necessity to implement the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is considered as a political tool to serve Chinese hegemonic aspiration in this century. East Turkistan is considered as a threat to the nationalist CCP leaders who are embracing ancient Chinese philosophy[6] in which difference is considered as a threat and it is never tolerated.[7] Another assumption which led to China implementing more oppressive actions is that when China has become more prosperous and powerful, its foreign policy is also getting more assertive. It transformed economic wealth into military might, believing that no one would dare to oppose it.[8]

In this study, initially, historical relations of China and East Turkistan are discussed. Also, CCP's assimilation and immigration policies towards the region, which greatly affect the demographic, cultural, and economic changes are evaluated. Then, the emergence of concentration camps, human rights violations, and cause of ferocious policies have been examined. Finally, the Chinese dream, the BRI, CCP's security, rise of nationalism, and international developments, which are considered in some extent directly or indirectly to play an essential role in the implementation of concentration camps and harsh policies are examined.

China and East Turkistan Relations in Historical Dimension

East Turkistan is a part of the Turkic homeland and Turkic people have been living since ancent times, Here, they have established great states and built rich civilizations. Tur, the first king of the Turan empire, established the Turan Empire between the sixth and seventh century B.C. Alp Er-Tunga, the most famous Turan King, was the third ruler after Tur and Pishan.[9] During his ruling, the capital city of the empire is today's Kashgar, which is located in East Turkistan and still has a special position in the Turkic world, with its old history and cultural richness. During the great Turan Empire, that stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Europe, China lacked central authority and was divided into small tribal states and was also struggling with the civil war and the attacks of the Huns. The first unified state and centralized government in China was built 221 B.C.,[10] which was limited to the interior regions of China today. China claims that East Turkistan is part of its territory since ancient times has been incompatible with any historical fact.

In the times when the ancestors of Uyghurs in East Turkistan established a magnificent empires like Turan, Hun, White Hun, Kushan, Kok Turk, Uyghurlar, Qarakhanid etc., were all hosted by East Turkistan. These magnificent states that have influenced not only the Turkic history and civilization, but also their legacy shaped the world politics for thousands of years.

China's relationship with East Turkistan can be traced back to the Han kingdom, when Zhang Qian (Han envoy and spy) arrived in the western regions in 138 B.C. This visit was not to seize the land or open a trade route but to seek help against the powerful Hun state.[11] Tarim basin is an important food source for the Huns. The king of the Han dynasty thought that if he could convince the Hun governors in East Turkistan to rebel against the Hun king, who was ruling in Mongolia, Hans could weaken the Huns and gain an advantage over them. Zhang Qian could not get the support he wanted and was imprisoned by the Huns. This prompted the Chinese to turn to these rich western regions. The Chinese administration has never given up this Western fascination and the dream of dominating these regions. However, they were not able to do this against strong Turkic states. Exploiting short periods of division among the Huns, the Han state sent troops to East Turkistan. In 96 A.D., they were repelled by the Kushan Empire and its leader Kanishka took control of the region.[12]

Tang dynasty wanted to occupy the region by taking advantage of the collapse of the Kok Turkics, but they were defeated by the Arab and Uyghur troops in the Talas War in 751 A.D. After being defeated in the Talas War, China has never been able to influence the Central Asian region for a period of a thousand years until 1757.[13] Even in the period of the Ming kingdom (1366–1644), whose ethnic origin was Han, the western border of the country did not go beyond Jiayu Guan, adjacent to Kumul, which indicates that the territory of the Ming kingdom was also limited.[14]

With the fall of Yarkent Khanate in 1678, small city states had emerged in East Turkistan. Civil wars and deepening ignorance had weakened the country in all aspects. Even though Manchu, one of the Altaic nations, who took over Ming and dominated China formerly, seized this opportunity and managed to occupy the region in 1759. Nevertheless, they lacked the ability to establish a firm authority. Thus, the western border of China passed through Jiayu Guan and reached Pamir and the eastern border of Central Asia.[15] Manchu administration could not maintain its stability in the region and the people of East Turkistan struggled for independence and re-established their dominance. In 1878, the Kashgaria state was threatened not only by civil war but also by the hostility of both Chinese and the Russians. With the fall of the East Turkistan state, Qing Dynasty took over the region and after consolidating its position and declared East Turkistan as a new province in 1884 by renaming it as Xinjiang (meaning new borderland) instead of its original name.[16]

After taking over the region, Chinese troops burnt the tomb of Yakup Bey (an important historical figure for Uyghurs) and a great massacre took place. China implemented harsh policies and imposed heavy taxes; due to this poverty spread amongst the people. By 1909, the situation reached such a degree that people were forced to leave their heritage land. The vineyards and gardens were destroyed, their assets were depleted and they could not afford to pay taxes anymore.[17] The Qing Dynasty was weakened by corruption and by the attack and oppression of the imperialist powers such as Japan and UK. The Manchu administration was overthrown in 1911 by Han nationalists movement that was led by Sun Yetsen and the Minguo government was founded. With the fall of the Manchu dynasty, a power vacuum was created and several autonomous militants appeared in East Turkistan.[18] Different militants engaged in struggles with each other to gain power, influence, and to ensure their presence in different parts of the region.

In 1933 and 1944, Turkic people succeeded in re-establishing the Republic of East Turkistan twice and they adopted peace, humanity, and virtue as the basis of state politics.[19] Although, both republics could not survive for a long time and they were overthrown as a result of the cooperation between Russia and China, they proved that the

people's desire for freedom did not fade. The CCP, with the support of the Soviet Union, defeated the Mingo government in 1949 and forced them to retreat to Taiwan. At the end of the same year, the CCP ended the East Turkistan Republic with the support of Moscow and took control of the region. On October, 1955 China renamed East Turkistan as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region.[20]

China's East Turkistan Policy

Although China declared East Turkistan as a province under its ruling in 1884, its full consolidation took place in the 1950s.[21] After the CCP seized East Turkistan, it gradually implemented various assimilation policies. Bringing immigrants that are predominantly Han ethnic groups, is one of their primary policies. China also aimed at reshaping the ethnic and cultural identity of the indigenous people according to its own interests. In order to achieve this goal, China is denying the true history and creating a new one according to CCP's mindset. China wants to legalize their claim in this borderland by introducing fake history as the true on, to show its own people and the world. They are also using these tactics of spreading fake news as if it's real in Tibet, over islands in South East Asia and Taywan. Taiwan is the only legitimate government of China, based on the fact that its only democratic government of China. CCP controlled China based on force, human rights abuse and so on, is therefore illegitimate.[22] But in reality, international community not recognising Taywan, CCP making pressure to Taypei as an illegitimate and part of its own. In Tibet and in East Turkistan affairs, China shamelessly propagating itself as a victim instead of tranging its own outdated and bad policy. At the same time, China applied such a method, which aims to cut physical and moral bonds between Turkic Muslims in China and ethnic and religious brothers living in neighboring countries, creating obstacles to interact with the Turkic and Islamic world, which China sees as a threat. Thus, CCP is envisioned to ensure that the indigenous people are fully assimilated into the Chinese culture by alienating their own history and culture.

1. Immigrants and Economic Domination

Whether it is Manchu, Mingo or the current CCP administration, one of China's ongoing policies that is uninterrupted towards East Turkistan is the immigration policy. The biggest advantage of China is its dense population and the disadvantage of East Turkistan, although having a wide geography, is its less population which is not as dense compared to China. Using this advantage, China wanted to change the population structure of the region by placing Chinese (Han) immigrants from the eastern parts of China in to the Turkic majority region and to take away the population advantage of the indigenous people. This idea stems from the CCP administration's belief in ancient Chinese philosophy that "difference is a threat". The idea that extinguishing ideological difference is beneficial to bring the different communities together has prevailed since ancient dynasties.[23] Chinese history is filled with examples of forcefully increasing influence, both culturally and politically, by implementing systematic assimilation and immigration policies in occupied regions. The Han migration to East Turkistan began in the late nineteenth century when the Manchu administration took over the region from Yakup Bey and the province of Xingjian was created. This contributed to the formation of the western borders of present China by forming the foundation or the settlement of Han immigrants (Table 1).[24]

Table 1. The situation of immigrant settlements in East Turkistan from Manchu administration until today.

Period	Facilitator	Subjects of the policy	Decision-making process	Development model
Manchu period	Manchu government	Soldiers, businessmen, criminals, smugglers	From center to local government	Development by force
Mingo period	Provincial government	Immigrants, soldiers, Monha tribes, government officials, refugees, Soviet forces	Based on the location of the local government, from top to bottom	Development in the form of management
CCP period	Central and provincial government	Soldiers, immigrants, political immigrants, entrepreneurs, Farmers and shepherds	From center to local government	Development in the form of administration

Source: Z. Ming, "Qing Dai Zhongqi Yilai Xinjiang Tudi Kaifa de Shehui Xue Yanjiu", *Sociological Review of China*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2015, pp. 77–85.

Fertile lands, strategic areas, and economic zones are a priority of the immigrant's settlement. Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), known as the settlement areas of soldiers and farmer soldiers, is allocated to the most strategical areas in the north and south of the Tengri (God) Mountains, which are abundant in water, natural resources, and have fertile soil. These lands were taken away by force or bought from the locals at a very cheap price and Han immigrants replaced the locals. Owning the land, protecting the border, settling the Han, and participating in economic activities during the peace period became the protocol of XPCC.[25] XPCC played a very important role in re-settling immigrants. It is one of the security policies of the state to bring Han immigrants to the cities and towns where the locals live. Migrants have been given an advantage in settlements, job opportunities, healthcare, education, and in other fields.

In 1949, Han comprised 6.7% (220 thousand)[26] of the population of East Turkistan, and this rate increased to 40% (8.4 million) in 2008.[27] In 1949, Uyghurs comprised 82% of the region's population, as the majority of them were living in southern regions. According to the government's statistics in 2010, the population of Uyghurs was only 46.4% and in the northern regions Han population already became the majority.[28] The rapid growth of the Han population is not in the form of natural growth. The Chinese government's immigration policy and economic support for immigrants played a major role in this population growth. Since the implementation of economic reform policies and the liberalization of the economy, the development of the region has been faster than other regions, except the east coast regions of China. Economic development has a definite effect on the increase of migrant waves based on economic interests. The economic developments in the region in general have favored the interest of Hans rather than Uyghurs. Energy resources are under the control of the Hans and not the Uyghurs as the revenue generally flows to Beijing.[29]

The Chinese government has strict population control on Uyghurs and in recent years, it has further developed its policies to facilitate the arrival of Han immigrants in the southern regions such as Kashgar, Hotan and so on, where Uyghurs are predominant. Regarding birth control, the party's chairman in the region explained last year that it is

essential to reduce the birth rate and to implement family planning policies, which is another remedy for measures against terrorism.[30] Some observers believe that this incident meant that the Chinese government's ultimate solution is to overpower Uyghurs.[31]

In other southern regions such as Kashgar and Hotan, which are the cultural centers of East Turkistan, Han immigrants have swiftly formed the demographic ring against the indigenous communities with a new wave of immigration. One of the main reasons for this, is strict regulations and practices for immigrants in other parts of China, such as education, healthcare, and insurance. For immigration to major cities, [Hukou (population registration)] there are strict requirements such as possession of higher education, special talent, working in government agencies or public companies. There are no such conditions applied for immigration to the southern region of East Turkistan.[32] While Hans made huge profits from economic developments, the same cannot be said for other ethnic groups.[33] These policy developments were seemed to be beneficial for dispatching Han migrants to the region but resulting in inequality, which would ultimately have negative impact on stability between communities.

2. Cultural Discrimination

Since 1949, the Chinese communist administration has been tightly controlling the ideas and movements of the people in the region, which they think might harm the integration. By rewriting the history of the region, CCP claimed that this land belongs to China since ancient times, whereas Uyghur intellectuals produced anti-theses.[34] In East Turkistan, it's forbidden to teach children their true history, instead they are forced to learn made up history in their lessons, which are tailored by the Chinese administration. The government has prohibited broadcasting, media, books, and any other publications without filtering.

The mosques that stand out in the streets, ladies with headscarves, Uyghurs wearing national dresses, writings in the Arabic letters were indicative of the religious and cultural identity of the indigenous people.[35] All these signs are gradually being eliminated by the Chinese administration. The culture and customs of East Turkistan, being different from the Han regions are considered as challenge by the Chinese administration. With an understanding that the differences are a threat, China wanted to eliminate them. To assimilate local people into the mainstream Han society, local traditions and customs were to be replaced by communist ideas and Chinese traditions. It is forbidden to use the Turkic names by all Turkic people, instead they are forced to use tribal names as if they are different nations from one another, such as Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Tatars. The Turkic names of the places were replaced by Chinese names. Giving name to children as Muhammed or similar names, which is common around the Muslim world, is considered also to be extremism and ideological disease. Eradicating ideological virus offered a comprehensive examination of repression targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples.[36]

Han culture is considered as a superior culture throughout China and it has been accepted as the norm and has been widely supported by the administration. As a result, it is not compulsory for the Han to learn the languages of other nations, but learning Chinese has been compulsory for other ethnicities. Even in regions where Turkic people are in majority, the Chinese do not feel the necessity to teach the Turkic languages. While Han's holidays are always gaining great support and celebrated with great enthusiasm and interest everywhere, the celebration of the public holidays of indigenous peoples are not supported and face various restrictions. Another sign of general

disdain is the difficulty to find accommodation for the people of East Turkistan when they arrive in the eastern regions of China, for example, they are denied to stay in the hotels. They cannot live in those areas as true Chinese like the Hans, instead, they are treated as second class citizens.[37] There is also racial discrimination in finding a job for local people based on their identity. Until the end of 1990s, 95% of the people working in the oil sectors in Taklimakan Desert were Han Chinese.[38] This is because in high paying jobs priorities are always given to the Han ethnicity.

3. Concentration Camps

In recent years, China has begun to make a radical change in the East Turkistan policy and it has further aggravated the formerly severe situation. In spring 2017, Uygur Autonomous Region's new secretary, Chen Quango established concentration camps as an excuse of re-education, which mainly consists of the Turkic minority (Uyghur, Kazakh, Kirgiz, Uzbek and Tatar), dispatching 1.5 million people to prison and concentration camps.[39] In his speech at the Pentagon, Schriver who leads Asia policy at the U.S. Defense Department said that the number of prisoners in the camp was around 3 million.[40] Re-education efforts, among especially the Uyghur population, began in late 2013 and gradually became more institutionalized, under the auspices of the XUAR's new party secretary, Chen Quanguo, the scale of these internments reached unprecedented levels in 2017.[41] The number of people in the camp could have exceeded 4 million. Uyghurs, with a population of 45%, are the main target of Chinese persecution but Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Hui Muslims were also send off to camps.[42] Between July 2017 and June 2018, 660,000 people were arrested in the south of East Turkistan and 1.3 million people were subjected to compulsory education (open political camp), which makes up 20% to 40% of most neighborhood population in the region.[43]

The Chinese administration tries to force Muslims, especially Turkics living in the region, to abandon their own culture and religion. Although the United Nations Human Rights Commission asked China to stop this practice, CCP has claimed that these are educational schools and there is no violation of human rights. However, they have been trying to hide information about the arrests, concentration camps, and have prevented foreign journalists and researchers from entering East Turkistan.[44] According to the statements of camp survivors and their relatives which I met in Turkey, the performance of brain washing actions has occurred in these camps. Muslims were forced to deny their religion, act against their own beliefs and customs, such as forced to drinking alcohol and eating pork (this is considered forbidden in Islamic Religion) and physical punishments have become a daily routine. The vice pres that said that, "Once, China signed an agreement on freedom and human rights. But in recent years, China has become more authoritative by making a U-turn and has turned towards persecuting its own people".[45]

Seventy two actions including, growing beards, not smoking, not drinking, and dyeing hair in red color are identified as the sign of religious fundamentalism. Similarly, traveling to 26 countries such as Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Uzbekistanis being seen as a sign of suspicion and guilt.[46] Even refusing to give their DNA sample, speaking in the mother tongue, and arguing with the authorities are considered crimes and those who do these acts are sent to the camps. In these camps, the subject of the lessons that are given is mainly to fight "the three evils",[47] beside this, Chinese history, language, and culture are also taught.[48] Additionally, practices related to local culture and beliefs are strictly prohibited in the camps. Such an imposition of Chinese

language and culture clearly shows the presence of a wide-scale forced assimilation policy. The oppression is not limited to force Muslims in East Turkistan to deny their religion, proving their loyalty to the CCP, sing songs that praise president Xi and the communist party, and subjecting people to various tortures. Besides, the Chinese government's oppressive hand has extended beyond the border of East Turkistan and stretched even to other countries in various parts of the world.[49]

Cause of the Implementation of Violence Policies

It is not a coincidence that an oppressive policy is put into practice against all Turkic Muslims, especially Uyghur Turks, as it is comprehensively thought-out applications and has different reasons such as stability of the region, CCP interest and so on. Transformation through education in the context of combating religious extremism and maintaining stability are very rare.[50] One of the main reasons is the ideological changes within the CCP and the internal security problems it has faced. Xi is using nationalist sentiment of the Chinese people for safeguarding his own power and to guarantee continuance of the CCP. Another reason is that China has been developing at an unpredictable pace and that this generates an extraordinary ambition for world domination among Chinese executives. Richness of the region with minerals and natural resource plus its unique geography provides the foundation for expansion. In order to awaken nationalism among Han people, who are majority in China, by creating propaganda about Islam and Turkic, which are branded as historical enemy of the Chinese, is considered to be a safer way to inspire nationalism and at the end to maintain CCP as a guardian of the Chinese against imaginary enemy.

The position of East Turkistan has a vital importance in realizing the BRI, which is developed to realize the Chinese dream or hegemony. One of China's aims is to assert itself in the international arena as a major power and, for this, control over borderland regions.[51] To maintain in this region, China does not want to see the existence of social groups who are different from them and are looked upon as a possible threat. In the international arena, miserable condition of the Islamic world and dominance of U.S. government by business minded Trump (who likes to play the money game rather than world politics and his carelessness about global human rights), was considered as an appropriate environment for China to launch its repressive policy.

Survival of CCP and Xi's Embrace of Nationalism

China has been ruled by the CCP since 1949, through the Marxist ideology that regarded religion as superstition and opium.[52] The communist party ideologically contradicts religious beliefs and its practices have been directed towards this. However, the current CCP is different from the communism that Karl Marxs, Lenin and Mao theorized or practiced. Nowadays in China, a mixed structure of authoritarian regime and state capitalism emerged under the single communist party rule. However, despite the change in the party's economic policies, its attitude towards religion has never changed and religion is still seen as a threat to the party's presence.

According to the Da Ji Yuan report, from December 2004 to September 2019, in China 342,148,211 people resigned from the membership of CCP and CCP affiliated institutions.[53] The Chinese people are increasingly losing their trust and loyalty to the CCP administration and there is a dissatisfaction even within the party. In response to this trend, the Chinese administration is trying to spread and propagate nationalism

rather than Marx's ideas, in order to protect and maintain the authority of the communist party. Therefore, in recent years, the persecution and violence against minority groups and religious members continued to increase rapidly, due to both the party ideology and the rising Han nationalism within the state. Violence against religious life is increasing in all its dimensions; Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian religious minority groups are all under threat.[54]

Xi, who became the president of China in March 2013, revealed that the Chinese Dream was aimed at "Great Renewal" of the Chinese people. He advocated the unified Chinese approach which must be followed and that all the powers of China should be combined to achieve this.[55] According to the CCP, public support is one of the most important factors in maintaining its rule and control. Since communist propaganda is not effective like before, to keep the people united and gain their loyalty to the party, the only way for this is that the economy of the country should be in constant growth and guarantee that the income and wealth of the people would increase. As well as Han nationalism should be stimulated and CCP position should be stabilized as a guarantor and facilitator of the progress. The CCP has invested heavily in the mainland and abroad to establish Confucius Institute, not Marx schools. Confucian ideas which are advocated by CCP are not real Confucian thoughts but teachings that are reinterpreted according to the party interests. However, CCP practices are incompatible with Han traditions, and the party is also challenging real Han belief and traditions.[56] That's the reason for persecuting Fa Lun Gong followers who wanted to rejuvenate ancient Chinese traditions.

The CCP is feeling more and more insecure by facing political and economic difficulties within the state. To ensure CCP legitimacy and getting the support of the people by economic development and growth is no longer as effective as before due to inequality in the growth of income. It has been the last option to pursue militant and revolutionary nationalism for the CCP administration to survive.[57] It is a maneuver to create or identify imaginary enemies within the state and abroad. To impose the threat perception to the Chinese people is considered a wise strategy to hide the dissatisfaction of the people towards the party via directing the public opinion into another direction. Uyghur, Tibet, Fa Lun Gong are portrayed as threat within the country, whereas in abroad, Japanese enmity, Taiwan betrayal and American aggression are among the most advertised topics that the Chinese media employs to strengthening nationalism, and safeguard the regime.

Hostility to religion in China, especially the pressure against Muslim minorities, has intensified in recent years. Some people may believe that CCP's atheist character, the ideology of Han superiority, and increasing nationalism is responsible for this. In reality, China's harsh policies against Muslims are not only related to the communist party, but also closely related to historical Han chauvinism.[58] The rapid rise of the Chinese economy overlays emphasis on material aspects of life and at the end has created a gap in the belief within the society. In the 2016 report of the US government office, it was reported that the number of believers in China was about 650 million.[59] In the integration of East Turkistan into Chinese's society and assimilation into Han culture, religious and cultural difference is considered to be the biggest obstacle. Together with this, re-emergence of Han chauvinism had a great impact on the implementation of forceful Hanification and repressive policies in the region.

Chinese Dream and the Position of East Turkistan

With the economic reform and opening up policy that was initiated in 1978, China has succeeded in a rapid economic development. Just in 40 years, it has transformed itself

from a poor third world country to the second largest economic power in the world. Economic enrichment of China greatly contributed to the rapid developments in technology, defense, and other fields. Xi aims to take the country further with the Chinese Dream that he has put forward. This goal includes enrichment, empowerment, national renewal, and building a socialist modern country.[60] No matter how peaceful words were used, wealth and power brought greed to Chinese executives. According to Gao Yu, Xi's "Chinese Dream" is not the dream of the people, but the dream of the red CCP.[61]

In the middle of the twenty-first century, China aimed to become the number one super power in the world. According to some intellectuals, the BRI is a clear sign to fulfill China's hegemonic ambition to become a true global power.[62] Although the CCP leaders voice for peaceful rises, but they have been implementing provocative and expansionary policies. The repressive policies of China stemmed from the fact that despite the rapid rise of Beijing, the American influence has been on the process of constant decline. They also strongly believe that this century belongs to China and no power could oppose it.[63]

The Tengri (God) Mountains at the center divide the region into two parts as the north and south. At the same time, the Tarim basin in the south and Jungar basin in the north possess fertile and rich soils which are suitable for agriculture, animal husbandry, and gardening. It has an abundance of minerals and natural resources, especially gold, uranium, oil, coal, natural gas, and cotton. One hundred and thirty-eight different kinds of minerals comprising 80% of China's minerals. New oil and gas fields in Tarim, Drungaria, and Turfan basins are discovered constantly.[64] It also has a vital geographical importance, as it borders with Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, India, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, and Tajikistan. Five of these neighboring countries have religious, historical, and cultural affinities with the region. This is one of the issues that concerns China the most and even during the Mao era different policies were implemented to curb the aspirations of freedom. Some Chinese top officials are still afraid of a Post-Soviet style independence of the region, which to some extent, possibly has an impact on the decision making and practices of bullying and brutal actions.

The BRI which undertakes the vision of the CCP management to serve foreign policy, economic, and security goals, aims to connect China to Asia, Africa, and Europe. The project covering 68 countries and trillion of dollars investment has been promised to different sectors such as transportation, energy, and telecommunications.[65] East Turkistan also serves for spreading the influence of China, meeting its energy needs, and realizing its dream. Most importantly, the region is the opening gate of China to the western world and considered a foundation to expand its political, cultural sphere of influence, and even to gain new future domains.

According to the Chinese government, more than 90% of the population belongs to the Han ethnicity, and the rest consists of 55 different ethnic groups. Even though their population is small, but the regions in which minorities are living is covering 64.3% of the landmass which is about 90% of the Chinese border lines.[66] Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and East Turkistan are the most important minority areas. Having the widest territory, rich mineral deposits, and special geographical location, East Turkistan's position is considered to be the most unique among them.

Moreover, East Turkistan and its people are significantly different from rest of the regions which are mostly dominated by Han culture. They have deep-rooted culture, belief, and civilizations, which is distinct from other parts of China. These differences are seen as a threat by China and subjected to elimination. This region became a battleground of systematic state ferocity and assimilation. This assimilation process is also con-

sidered a preparation for China to spread its cultural hegemony towards the west. Chinese leaders understood it as beneficial and indispensable for the consolidation of economic, political and military hegemony in the Eurasian continent. Not only for the eternal assurance of controlling the region and success of the BRI, which is designed by the Chinese rulers, but also constructive for the spread of Han culture towards the western direction. These formed the basis for the systematic implementation of violence and assimilation policies in East Turkistan.

China sees advancement towards the western region (Central Asia) not as a strategic option but also as a necessity. Central Asia is seen as a large, golden nugget, that God bestowed to the Chinese.[67] Because the Chinese natural border in the East reached the Pacific Ocean and beyond, there are strong navel powers like Japan and the US. At the Northern front, there is Russia, a strong military power. The only place which China has strategic advantage to expand is western region from Pamir to Atlantis. These regions are rich in natural resources and have huge land which China really wanted. This area is definitely in a power vacuum (lack of regional leader) that consist of poor and weak countries, no strong power or viable rival who is able to stop Chinese expansion. At the dawn of the new millennium, Uyghur region will again become the 'pivot of Asia', standing poised to wield great impact on world politics and economics.[68] The only problem is that most of the countries in the region are Muslim or Turkic majority which has religious and cultural affinity to East Turkistan. That's why China's real mission is to deal with Islam and Turkic identity. Although the incarceration of Turkic Muslims in concentration camps is attempted to be shown as education against terrorism by China but in reality it is the Islamic civilization and Turkic identity that makes them different from Han culture and that it is seen as a threat by the administration and subjected to Sinification.[69]

International Developments and Response

With the presidential election in 2016, business minded Trump became the President of the USA as a successor of Obama. He tried to confine universal human rights and democracy within the borders of his country. He emphasized more on short term national interest mostly concerning with money. Trump's emphasizing narrow-minded national interest focusing on short-term economic benefits ignored the core value of liberal international order such as human rights, fairness, democratic rules in international affairs.[70] Even some high officials have condemned concentration camps in international platforms. But US president Trump had made no comment.[71] This problematic approach negative effects of relations with Europe and other democratic alliance to respond together as a strong voice against human rights violations. This at the end weakened American positions and damaged its influence around the world. China benefited from the tensions and incoherence that had emerged in democratic world. The miserable situations of the Muslim countries made them unable to positively respond to the persecution of Muslims in Arakan, Kashmir, Palestine, and other regions. Muslim countries choose to keep silent and remained ineffective against those injustices. It was seen by Chinese rulers, as a perfect opportunity and appropriate time to implement assimilation policies on a larger scale.

Unlike predecessors, Trump ignored issues such as democracy and human rights and made short term economic interests as a basis of US foreign policy. Muslim majority countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan which used to pretend to be a guardian of Muslims, instead of condemning the oppression of Muslims in China, openly

supported China's policy of oppression against Muslims at various international platform and they even ignored Islamic principles and the moral values of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). In the United Nations' meeting held in July 2019, 22 countries including United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan came together to demand China to close concentration camps in East Turkistan, but not even a single country sharing same race or religion with East Turkistan was on that list. Even Muslim majority countries such as Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia etc., submitted open letter to support and express solidarity with China's repression.[72]

The rapid modernization of China in terms of economy, technology, and military has awakened the global hegemonic ambition of the CCP administration. At the same time this led to the change in balance of power in the world. The rise of China has begun to be seen as a threat to America's hegemonic power status in the world. In particular, the Trump administration has weakened America's position in the world by allowing other regional powers to be more effective in international affairs.[73] For many countries in the Islamic world, South America and Africa, which do not respect human rights in their own counties, China has started to be seen as an alternative to America. These countries have become a vocal supporter of China at various international platforms including human rights platforms. Most of countries in these regions are authoritarian, poor, have no modern economic structure, and bribery is common and that's why China has been effective on debt diplomacy. China has been very successful in collaborating with governments of such countries on international platforms using its economic heavyweight. It is no coincidence that there are no real democracies and developed economies within the countries that support China's human right violations in East Turkistan.

In recent times, some western countries and international organizations began to show concern over severe human rights violation in China, but they failed to take decisive action to make pressure on CCP, which enabled China to continue human rights violations and expand its repressive policies beyond East Turkistan. According to the Human Rights Watch: World Report, 2019:

> Authorities dramatically stepped up repression and systematic abuses against the 13 million Turkic Muslims, including Uyghurs and ethnic Kazakhs, in China's northwestern Xinjiang region. Authorities have carried out mass arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment of some of them in various detention facilities, and increasingly imposed pervasive controls on daily life. New regulations in Tibet now criminalize even traditional forms of social action, including community mediation by religious figures. In Hong Kong, a region promised "a high degree of autonomy" under the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the Chinese and Hong Kong governments hastened their efforts in 2018 to undermine people's rights to free speech and political participation. The government maintains tight control over the internet, mass media, and academia. Authorities stepped up their persecution of religious communities, including prohibitions on Islam in Xinjiang, suppression of Christians in Henan province, and increasing scrutiny of Hui Muslims in Ningxia.[74]

The size and scope of violation has exceeded far beyond the mere human right issue of one group or ethnicity. It has now become a concern for whole humanity and it is not only limited to Uygurs or Tibetians. Even the Han Chinese, when they choose the idea to live with human dignity and faith, are being subjected to persecution. The war against the faith is not limited to Islam, but Christianity, Buddhism and traditional Chinese beliefs have also become a target. If our world community remains divided

and silent in the face of such tragedy and does not take decisive action, even worse scenarios will occur. There is a high possibility of expansion of this repression, not only into the whole China but also to other like-minded countries around the world, through exporting these tragic ideas to those governments.

Conclusion

China and East Turkistan are two different geographies and civilizations that have a long history of bilateral relations. In 1949, East Turkistan lost its political sovereignty and was subjected to the CCP rule. Since then, national and cultural identity of East Turkistan has also been threatened and by implementing assimilation policy, CCP wanted to replace Islamic belief and Turkic identity with the Han culture. In the past few years, millions of people have been detained into concentration camps and as many people have become victims of brutal policies. Collectively, they were forced to change their national identity and renounce their faith. Not only Turkic Muslims in the region but also other religious members were negatively affected by this situation. The brutal practice is on the way to expand into other regions and continues extending to control other communities nationwide.

The event is no longer a problem of a single community, it has already turned into a whole humanity concern. It is very likely that the same scenario would not only expand into other parts of China but will also be exported to foreign countries. A number of Uyghur and Han Chinese intellectuals, such as Orkesh (Wu'erKaisxi) and Vicky Xiuzhong Xu[75] along with common people have realized severity of this problem and are already acting in the international arena, together with the people living in democratic countries who are conscious about the future of humanity. Recently, some governments in western countries have begun to demonstrate their concern about CCP's vicious human rights violations. While China has denied the existence of concentration camps in the past, after revelation of facts, it has now begun to defend legality of these camps. If a strong message is given to the Chinese administration by the world community, including democratic countries and the Islamic world, it might change the perception of the Chinese rulers and force them to close those camps. Raising awareness of the world community on the severity of the situation, dangers of the persecution, and its expansion into other parts of the globe is crucial to mobilize governments around the world to undertake decisive actions to end CCP's persecutions in East Turkistan and beyond.

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